

ハゲタカ学会であるか否かを決定する為の基準の開発

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Developing a Criteria for Identifying Predatory Conferences

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要旨 Predatory, for-profit academic conferences are an increasing problem around the world. Predatory conference organizers hold events with the aim to profit as much as possible by taking advantage of researchers' need to present research findings. This paper proposes a set of criteria for identifying predatory conference organizers. It then applies the criteria to conferences organized by scholarly societies, for-profit companies, and predatory organizers to determine how many criteria should be met before labelling a conference as predatory.

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本文

I. Introduction

Predatory conferences have become a severe threat to scholarly communication. Predatory conferences are for-profit, academic meetings that exploit researchers' need to share and present their research and are held primarily to make money for their organizers. In 2013 the problem became serious enough to attract the attention of the popular press and articles about predatory conferences appeared in *The New York Times* as well as *Popular Science* and *Science* (Kolata,

2013; Harbison, 2013; Cohen, 2013). Four years later, academics from around the world continue to either fall victim or become willingly involved with predatory conferences so the problem continues to grow. Predatory conference organizers find Japan an attractive target for predatory conferences. A survey of the websites of known and suspected predatory conference organizers show they hold events in Japan every month (McCrostie, 2016a, p.132).

The overall conference experience often suffers at predatory conferences. For example, a conference might consist of a handful of people giving talks on unrelated fields to each other in a tiny hotel room with the speeches failing to start or finish on time. However, not all predatory conference organizers are small, amateurish, fly-by-night operations. Predatory conference organizers want to make as much money as possible and there's more money to be made by offering a decently organized event. As a result, even experienced academics can get fooled. For example, *Science* magazine reported that a Nobel laureate attended a predatory conference and called the organization "OK" (Cohen, 2013 p.76). Therefore, a polished conference experience should not automatically qualify a conference as legitimate and non-predatory. A well-run conference that allows low-quality research to get presented alongside that of research from honest academics in order to maximize profits remains predatory. Given the rise in the absolute number of predatory conferences and the increasingly sophisticated organizations selling them, it has become necessary to develop a set of criteria to identify predatory conference organizers.

The purpose of this paper is to propose a list of criteria to identify predatory conference organizers and determine how many criteria should be met in order to label an organizer as predatory. Part II of this paper proposes a set of criteria for identifying predatory conference organizers. Part III applies the criteria to three conferences organized by scholarly associations, two conferences organized by for-profit companies, and conferences organized by six known and suspected predatory conference organizers. Part IV of the paper discusses the results and proposes the number of criteria required to be met to be labelled as a predatory conference organizer.

II. A Proposed Criteria for Identifying Predatory Conference Organizers

Drawing partly on MacPherson's (2015) paper *Recommended Practices to Ensure Technical Conference Content Quality* I developed the following checklist to classify a conference organizer as predatory. It has been adapted from an earlier draft published on Jeffrey Beall's Scholarly Open Access blog (McCrostie, 2016b). The checklist consists of two levels. The first level consists of deceitful and other predatory practices. An organizer meeting these criteria that prey on unsuspecting scholars should result in the conference organizer being labelled as predatory. The second level involves poor-quality conference organizing practices that, while a

concern, the existence of a single example alone is not sufficient to automatically label an organizer as predatory.

Red Level Criteria

A1. The use of deceit.

- a) Claiming to be a non-profit organization when the organizer is a for-profit company.
- b) Hiding or obscuring relationships with for-profit partner companies.
- c) Falsely claiming the involvement of people on advisory boards or organizing committees.
- d) Falsely claiming universities or other organizations as partners or sponsors.
- e) Listing addresses or phone numbers that are nonexistent or false.
- f) Using organization names that imply they are based in one country or region when in fact they operate out of a different country or region.
- g) Using fake names to hide the identity of organizers or their country of origin.
- h) Failing to list the names and affiliations of individuals owning or controlling the organization.
- i) Organizers falsely claiming academic positions or academic qualifications.
- j) The name of the conference matches or nearly matches the name of an established, respected conference.
- k) Lying to conference participants.

A2. Inadequate Peer Review

- a) Machine-generated or other “sting” abstracts or papers get accepted.
- b) Organizers market conferences as being peer-reviewed when no peer-review occurs.
- c) Organizers market conferences as being peer-reviewed but it is not independent; the conference organizing company employees review submissions.
- d) Peer reviewers read abstracts with insufficient credentials or experience to do so.
- e) Vetting of peer reviewers is absent or inadequate.

A3. Conference Proceedings and Publications

- a) The conference organizer publishes a journal or journals that consist of non-peer-reviewed conference papers or allows conference papers to be published twice (in the official conference proceedings and a separate journal published by the conference organizer).
- b) The organizer promises that papers will be published in an unnamed journal indexed in ISI, SCOPUS, or some other commonly-used whitelist.

A4. Connections to other predatory conference organizers or journals.

- a) Conference papers get funneled to known or suspected predatory journals.

- b) Conference chairs, session chairs, keynote speakers, or conference proceeding editors have connections to other predatory conference organizers or journals.

A5. Virtual Presentations

- a) Acceptance of virtual presentations that are not presented to an audience.
- b) Virtual presentation papers get published in conference proceedings without being identified as such.

A6. Miscellaneous

- a) The conference organizer(s) and/or director(s) possess no expertise in the conference subject matter.
- b) Participants are charged additional fees when authoring or co-authoring more than one conference paper.
- c) Organizers cancel conferences with little or no warning or change venues on short notice.

Yellow Level Criteria

The yellow level consists of poor conference organizing practices that alone fail to provide sufficient justification for classifying the organizer as predatory. However, meeting several yellow level criteria would label the organizer as predatory. The required number shall be proposed in the discussion section.

B1. Fees

- a) The conference fee is unjustifiably high.
- b) Presenters pay more than attendees.
- c) The conference organizer sells conference dinners and associated tours at a profit.

B2. Conference Scope

- a) The conference is overly broad in scope.
- b) The conference(s) combine different fields; for example, business and engineering.
- c) A single organization holds conferences in very different fields.
- d) The organizer simultaneously holds more than two conferences at the same time and place.
- e) The same conference is held more than twice a year in different cities.

B3. Submission Acceptance

- a) Submitted abstracts or papers receive acceptance within an unrealistically brief time frame, e.g. under two weeks.
- b) Regular extensions to the Call for Papers submission deadline or accepting papers after the deadline passed.
- c) Using Undergraduate or Master's students as peer reviewers without oversight.

B4. Miscellaneous

- a) The organizer regularly sends spam emails to people outside the field of the conference.
- b) The name of the person or organization acting as the conference website “registrant” gets hidden on website registry documents.
- c) The conference gets marketed as a holiday. Conference websites and emails resemble travel brochures rather than conference notices.
- d) Overuse of the term “international” in the organization name or conference title when the conference organizer and/or attendees overwhelmingly come from a single country.
- e) Awarding best paper prizes before the end of the conference, awarding multiple “best paper” prizes.
- f) When proceedings are published only digitally, no attempt is made to electronically preserve them. No attempts are made to distribute conference proceedings beyond the conference participants.
- g) Organizers create a “society”, “association” or “institute” or some other organization and name it as the sponsor or organizer of the conference.
- h) No clear conference chair or director is identified.
- i) There are insufficient contact details for the organizer or conference. Or the organization headquarters location is obscured by using P.O. boxes or virtual offices. Or the listed office is in reality a private home.
- j) The conference’s conference schedule is overly vague, consisting of only times and the type of activity. For example: Paper Session 1 9:30-10:30. Break. Paper Session 2 10:45-11:45.
- k) Including the Google Scholar logo on conference websites or mentioning that conference proceedings get indexed by Google Scholar in an attempt to gain legitimacy.
- l) Conference websites and/or emails contain several spelling mistakes, grammar mistakes, or unnatural English.

III. Applying the criteria

To determine whether the above proposed criteria identifies predatory conference organizers without falsely blacklisting legitimate conferences I applied it to conferences organized by three scholarly societies, two for-profit conferences, and six known or suspected predatory conference organizers.

The three scholarly societies examined were the: International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL), American Society for Microbiology (ASM), and Japan Society of Civil Engineers (JSCE). I selected these three societies to examine practices in different geographical regions (Europe, North America, and Asia) and different academic fields

(social science, science, and engineering) that are often targeted by predatory conference organizers.

An examination of the organization and conference websites for IATEFL's *Annual Conference and Exhibition* failed to show the presence of any red or yellow level criteria. However, it should be noted that for IATEFL and the other scholarly societies the five criteria under A2 (inadequate peer review) were not examined in detail. ASM's *ASM Microbe 2016* and *ASM Conference* series failed to meet any of the red or yellow level criteria. While ASM conference fees are paid to the event managing company Experient Inc. this information is clearly stated on the website. The conference also sold a Boston city tour however, a review of the tour operator website showed the conference offered it at cost and was not exploiting attendees. JSCE's *International Summer Symposium* and *Annual Meeting* events met zero red level criteria and one yellow level criteria: B4i. The English version of the organization and conferences websites contained several typos.

The for-profit conferences examined were the American Association of Behavioral and Social Sciences' (AABSS) *Annual Conference* and International Teaching Learning Cooperative Network's (ITLC) *Lilly Conference* series. These two organizations were examined because an individual connected to one of the conferences privately expressed concern to the author that an earlier draft of this criteria would unfairly label them as predatory.

AABSS's events meet one red level criteria and up to three yellow level criteria. It met the red level criteria A1b because the conference and organization websites fail to make it clear that fees are paid to Academic Research Resources, LLC which is owned by the conference director. While this author does not, some might argue that the conference's promotional videos place undue stress on the conference's Las Vegas location fulfilling B4c. It also meets the yellow level criteria B4g because the AABSS was created to organize the conference. Finally, criteria B4i is met because the AABSS's office address is not clearly stated.

ITLC's Lilly conference series meet one red level criteria (A1b) because the conference websites fail to make clear that the ITLC is a Limited Liability Corporation. It also meets three yellow level criteria: B2e because the conference series is held five times a year in five cities, B4g because the conference websites make it seem that the ITLC is a scholarly society or association, and B4i because ITLC's address is a P.O. box.

The events put on by six suspected predatory conference organizers met far more of the criteria. The six organizations were selected for examination because they have all been mentioned in blog posts or comments on Jeffrey Beall's Scholarly Open Access blog devoted to identifying predatory publishers. One Malaysia-based company met at least eight red level and 15 yellow level criteria. A China-based company claiming an American headquarters met at least

seven red and 14 yellow criteria. A Poland-based company claiming to be based in London met at least ten red and 15 yellow criteria. A Taiwan-based company met at least five red and 15 yellow. A second Malaysia-based company met at least four red, and 11 yellow. A Japan-based organization consisting of a for-profit company and a not-for-profit with the same name met at least eight red and 12 yellow level criteria. The number of red and yellow level criteria that the six above mentioned organizations met means that all would be considered predatory organizers under the proposed criteria.

IV. Discussion

The results of applying the criteria to conferences in section III demonstrate that it identifies predatory conference organizers without falsely blacklisting legitimate conferences organized by either scholarly associations or for-profit companies. Since some legitimate conferences organized by for-profit companies met one criteria, and to avoid falsely accusing legitimate conference organizers, the presence of more than three red level practices should classify a conference organizer as predatory. If conferences held by an organizer fail to meet three red level criteria but do meet ten or more yellow level criteria the conference organizer should still be labelled as predatory.

Applying the criteria to the six predatory organizers also reveals which criteria are the most commonly applicable to predatory conference organizers. Criteria A1a and A1b, false claims to be a non-profit and obscuring relationships with for-profit companies, were met by four of the six organizers and the other two simply avoided mentioning if they were for-profit or not. Five of the organizers either performed no peer review or had peer review performed by readers with insufficient credentials. As a result, four accepted computer-generated nonsense SCIgen abstracts.¹ Unfortunately, without exhaustive searches of company registration documents and submitting fake abstracts it is time consuming and unrealistic for academics to identify predatory conference organizers using these criteria.

Luckily some other criteria prove simpler to apply. In addition to charging higher than typical conference fees, all six suspected predatory organizers charged presenters more than audience members but none of the conferences organized by scholarly societies or legitimate for-profit organizers required presenters to pay more. All six suspected predatory conference organizers also held overly broad conferences, held conferences in very different academic

¹ The second Malaysian company and the Japanese company rejected SCIgen abstracts. The Japanese company did accept a human written nonsense abstract and a plagiarized abstract as a result of using unqualified peer reviewers.

disciplines, simultaneously held three or more conferences, and held the same or similar conferences more than twice a year in different cities. In contrast among the legitimate conference organizers only one held the same conference more than twice a year. Five of the six suspected predatory organizers also accepted papers in under a week and regularly extended the submission deadline for their Call for Papers while none of the legitimate organizers could be found to meet these two criteria. As a result, any conference organizer whose events meet the criteria B1a, B1b, B2a, B2c, B2d, B2e, B3a, or B3b deserve extra scrutiny before a researcher decides to submit a paper.

V. Conclusion

The fact that so many researchers continue to attend and even help organize events arranged by predatory conference organizers means more work needs to be done to educate academics about the danger of predatory conferences. Established researchers must view conferences with greater suspicion and exercise due diligence to avoid those which are only held to generate profits. Researchers must also take greater care not to attend conferences simply because they are held in an attractive locale. Universities must educate graduate students about which conferences in their discipline are worth attending and how to identify predatory conferences. Universities also need to look closer at the conference presentations and conference organizing duties listed on curricula vitae when making hiring and promotion decisions.

Finally, it needs to be recognized that different academic disciplines have different accepted practices surrounding conference presentations and organization. Therefore, not all criteria will be applicable to conferences in all disciplines. This set of criteria is meant to be a guideline for academics and administrators to help them identify predatory conference organizers.

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